

THE STATE OF AMERICAN BOYHOOD

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ABSTRACT

The existence of a “boy crisis” in the United States is a topic of educational policy debate. While the problems of girls in schools have been addressed for many years, should boys now become the focus of educational reform? To clarify this issue, this study reviews national statistics on the well-being of American boys and young men, examining not only the usual school indicators but also such issues as mental health, premature deaths, juvenile delinquency and arrest rates. Boys are in trouble in many areas: low rates of literacy, low grades and engagement in school, high dropout rates, placement in special education, especially in the more subjective areas of emotional disturbance and learning disabilities, more suspension and expulsions from school, and lower rates of postsecondary entrance and completion. Boys also suffer from dramatically higher suicide rates, conduct disorders, premature death, and rates of arrest and juvenile delinquency. Girls, however, are far more apt to suffer from depression and eating disorders, lower scores on mathematics and science tests, and are less likely to achieve at the very highest levels. This study argues that both boys and girls suffer from characteristic problems, but the issues affecting boys are serious and neglected.

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Whether or not a “boy crisis” actually exists or whether this “crisis” amounts to little more but overblown rhetoric, fueled by an anti-feminist agenda, is at the center of a new educational policy debate. On one side of this controversy are those who argue that the nation is facing a “new gender gap” with many boys falling dangerously behind in academic achievement and college graduation, and entering a new knowledge economy for which they are woefully underprepared. On the other side of the debate are policy analysts who argue that the widely-publicized “boy crisis” is non-existent, overblown, or, at most, limited to minority boys. At stake are limited attention, time, and resources. Should boys now become the focus of educational reform? Should teachers and schools make the needs of boys a priority? Should government agencies and foundations direct funds to programs that enhance the achievement and college attendance of boys?

This paper briefly reviews the policy debate, dividing it into three stages: 1. The schools are shortchanging girls 2. The schools are shortchanging boys 3. Debunking the idea of a “boy crisis.” Each stage is described through the major publications that crystallize each position in different time periods of this debate. This paper then reviews the evidence for a “boy crisis,” relying on the most recent statistical data, such as the

National Assessment for Educational Progress and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

The argument of this paper is that neither girls nor boys are “in crisis” with the exception of Black young men. Rather boys and girls suffer from different types of characteristic problems. The problems of boys are centered in literacy, school engagement, placement in special education, high school dropout rates, enrollment and graduation in postsecondary programs, mental health problems such as suicide and conduct disorders, and criminal activities. Despite a few studies to the contrary, the achievement gap in the natural sciences and mathematics for girls has not closed at the highest levels of achievement. While girls have far lower rates of suicide than boys, they suffer from more mental health problems such as depression, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation, gestures, and attempts. Schools need to pay attention to the difficulties of both girls and boys and bring these problems to the attention of families, teachers, and mental health professionals.

The Policy Controversy

Stage I: The Schools Are Shortchanging Girls

In the early 1990s, a plethora of popular books argued that girls were suffering psychological damage as a result of the cultural construction of the female gender role and educational neglect. Typical books, such as Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1993), Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), and Peggy Orenstein’s *School Girls* (1994) asserted that girls,

especially at adolescence, suffered from loss of voice, lower self-esteem, and pressures to conform to female cultural expectations of attractiveness, compliance, and passivity. Sadker and Sadker's *Failing and Fairness* (1994), as well as an earlier literature review (Sadker, Sadker, and Klein 1991) focused on gender inequities in the schools, emphasizing that the content of the curriculum and the practices of teachers advantaged boys. Teachers, for example, gave boys more attention than girls, chastized girls who didn't raise their hands while accepting the call-outs of boys, and were more apt to engage in sustained intellectual dialogue with boys, which promoted their cognitive development.

The issue of gender inequity in the schools burst into the consciousness of educators, parents and the public through a highly publicized report and media campaign by the American Association of Women (AAUW), *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (1992). This report crystallized the issue: Girls are at risk. Girls have lower test scores in mathematics and science, lower scores on high-stakes college entrance tests and lower self-esteem. Teachers tailor classroom activities to boys' interests and do not prevent boys, for example, from dominating science experiments while girls observe from the side.

How Schools Shortchange Girls, together with other publications of the period, drew attention to the educational and psychological problems of American girls and exerted substantial influence on national policy. The 1994 Gender Equity in Education Act identified girls as an underserved population and directed funding toward girls' needs. Federal agencies and foundations made girls' issues a priority. The result was numerous

programs devoted to increase the self-confidence of girls, the achievement of girls in mathematics and science and increasing their interest in pursuing mathematics, science, and engineering careers. Typical examples were science camps for girls and teacher training programs in classroom equity in Schools of Education and teacher in-service programs. A spate of publications from such organizations as the Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, funded by the Department of Education, promoted the development of "gender-fair" instructional materials. Textbook publishers emphasized women's lives and contributions to society as a means of boosting girls-self esteem. Textbook adoption committees in school districts considered such coverage crucial to textbook selection, a powerful pressure on publishers. A writing section was added to the SAT, a domain where girls excelled, in part to increase scores on this high-stakes test.

In sum, the idea that girls were at risk, that schools were a central source of their problems, and that schools were a pivotal institution through which gender inequities could be addressed led to numerous federal, state, school district, and foundation programs. These efforts to promote girls' interests succeeded in creating a new public policy problem and in changing educational practice.

Stage II: The schools are shortchanging boys

The contrary position, that girls are the sex at risk and that schools actually favor girls, developed in the late 1990s. Tom Mortenson, an educational analyst who publishes highly respected analyses of higher education issues in *Postsecondary Education Opportunity* was the first to

draw attention to the gender gap in college attendance and graduation. In such reports as *The State of American Manhood* (2006), Mortenson argued that the problems of boys and young men were rooted in changing employment patterns. Occupational demand in areas of traditionally male high-paying employment, such as manufacturing, have greatly declined reducing opportunities for men with low levels of education. Men with a high school education or less were more likely to be unemployed in times of economic decline and were experiencing substantial declines in real income—a drop in median annual income by 38 percent from 1973 to 2004 among men who lacked a high school diploma and by 26 percent for men with only a high school education. Women, on the other hand, were increasing their participation in higher education and able to attain more stable, high-paying positions in the knowledge economy. Sum, Fogg, and Harrington (2003) also drew attention to the lower participation and attainment of men in higher education and argued that the weaker educational attainment of men decreased labor productivity and economic growth.

Popular books again brought the issue of boys' problems to the attention of parents and educators. Michael Gurian's books *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* (2002) and *The Minds of Boys* (Gurian and Stevens 2005) argued that these problems were rooted in the schools' lack of responsiveness to patterns of male development, for example, the later maturation of boys which put them at a disadvantage. William Pollack's *Real Boys* (1998) argued that the gender construction of masculinity that encouraged boys to hide their emotions and present to the world a stereotyped image of masculinity which idealized toughness, which he

called the “Boy Code.” In *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, Kindlon and Thompson (2000) also urged greater attention to boys’ developmental and emotional problems and suggested ways in which counselors, teachers, and families could deal with boys’ issues in gender-appropriate ways. Sax (2005, 2007) argued that the central problem was boys’ lack of motivation and “failure to launch.” Many young men were living at home with their parents through their twenties and not assuming independent adult roles.

The publication which crystallized the view that boys, not girls, are the victims of discrimination in the schools was Christinal Hoff Sommer’s book, *The War Against Boys* (2000). The AAUW report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, Sommers charged, was riddled with errors, crucial research on which its arguments were based had oddly disappeared, and boys were, in fact, behind girls on most measures of school success. The subtitle of *The War Against Boys —How Misguided Feminist is Harming Our Young Men*—laid responsibility for the neglect of boys on feminists and unfortunately laid the groundwork for the political charge that concern for boys lay in an anti-feminist agenda.

The idea that boys are in trouble resonated with parents, especially middle class parents. Many were worried that so many of their sons had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and prescribed drugs such as Ritalin which might damage their developing brains. They suspected that teachers’ intolerance for active, boisterous boys, not their sons’ presumed deficits, was responsible. Parents were concerned that many of their sons were not working as hard in school as their daughters

and were absorbed in videogames. They were concerned that admissions officials would pass over their capable, high-achieving daughters in order to achieve gender balance in college enrollments at prestigious schools. And they worried about the marriage possibilities of their well-educated daughters, their difficulties in finding mates who could match their achievements and education.

The second stage in this debate, the emphasis on the problems of boys rather than girls, led to minimal changes in federal policy and school programs. No federal legislation comparable to the 1994 Gender Equity in Education Act was established. Laura Bush in her “Helping America’s Youth” initiative did include boys’ problems in school among youth needs, but this federal effort faded with no federal task force charged with examining the problems of boys and no changes in agency mandates or funding. Foundations have been reluctant to support the issue, except for programs targeting the long-established problems of African-American boys.

Great Britain and Australia, on the other hand, have succeeded in launching national initiatives to raise the achievement of boys (Boys Education Lighthouse Schools, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Sommers, 2000). No national organizations in the United States or politically powerful advocacy groups have addressed boys’ problems. The exception is the National Association for Single Sex Public Schooling, organized by Leonard Sax, which advocates single-sex schools and classrooms for boys as well as girls. The Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education did issue in 2008 modified regulations allowing single sex classrooms so long as

equivalent instruction was provided in co-educational classrooms, and these changes in regulations also allowed for single sex schools. But this minor change in regulations has been virtually the only American policy effort to address the problems of boys. While a few educational consultants have worked with teachers to increase their awareness of boys' educational needs and to develop sex-appropriate strategies and a handful of single-sex schools and classrooms have been established, these efforts have reached few boys.

Debunking the Idea of a "Boys' Crisis"

Two widely publicized reports have challenged the idea that boys are in crisis, with the exception of minority boys. Sara Mead (2008) in *The Truth About Boys and Girls* published by the think tank, the Education Sector, argued that the boys' crisis is non-existent, the gains of girls have not come at the expense of boys, and that any boy crisis is limited to Black and Hispanic boys. The AAUW issued another rebuttal, *Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education* (Corbett, Hill and St. Rose, 2008), made a similar argument. Educational achievement is not a zero-sum game—the numbers of boys, as well as girls, who enter and graduate from college have increased, and, for younger boys, achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has improved, with boys matching girls in literacy and other domains. A report rebutting these arguments, *Taking the Boys Crisis in Education Seriously* (Kafer, 2007) was poorly publicized and ignored. Published by the Independent Women's Forum, the report argued again that boys, not girls, are in trouble in schools, that many boys did not develop the literacy crucial to success in the knowledge economy, and that federal programs have appropriated large

sums of money to increase the achievement of girls, while the problems of boys are ignored.

Advocates arguing that the educational problems of girls and women still merit serious policy attention acknowledge that the gender gap in mathematics has closed (Hyde et al., 2008). The low number of women who become mathematicians, engineers, physicists, and scientists has now become the focus of their policy efforts (Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering, 2006).

Purpose of this Study and Limitations

This report examines the state of American boyhood first in the schools and then in other less publicized domains, such as mental health, suicide, premature death, injury, delinquency and arrest rates. This study also examines less-known sex differences, such as gender differences in the success of top achievers, the winners of the Intel Science Talent Search, the Siemens Competition in Math, Science, and Technology, and Rhodes Scholars.

In evaluating sex differences in these domains, I have used the most recent, nationally representative information available. A major problem is the lack of data analyzed not only by sex but also by race and socioeconomic status. To deal with these problems, I have examined sex differences in the reports of school districts on gender issues, but the particular demographics of these districts limit the generalizability of the findings.

Another problem is the way the statistics are analyzed and presented. An analysis comparing the proportions of boys and girls who are suspended or placed in special education, for example, is sometimes done using the proportion of girls versus boys in these categories and sometimes the proportion of girls and boys in these categories in the school population. An analysis comparing the proportion of girls and boys in a particular category often suggests a serious policy problem while the proportion in the school population suggests a far less serious problem.

Gender Gaps in Achievement Test Scores

Achievement at the 12th grade: Achievement gaps at the senior year of high school are the most crucial, since this grade marks the end of formal schooling for many students. Since differences in average scores on these tests are difficult to interpret, I analyze gender gaps among students who fall “Below basic,” since these students are unprepared for most occupations, and among students who achieve at the “proficient and advanced levels,” who are prepared for postsecondary education and for participation in a democratic society.

At the 12th grade level, boys fall far behind girls in the foundational skills of reading and writing. At the end of high school, more than a quarter of young men (26%) fall below basic in writing and just 16% achieve at the proficient or advanced levels. In contrast, just 11% of young women fall below basic in writing and 31% achieve at the proficient or advanced levels. The gender gap in writing is staggering among Black and Hispanic students. At the end of high school, almost half (42%) of Black young men fall below

basic compared to less than a quarter (22%) of Black young women. Similarly, 36% of Hispanic young men score below basic compared to 21% of Black young women.

Serious differences in writing achievement occur when socioeconomic status (measured by the highest level of education achieved by one parent) is taken into account. For example, among Black male 12th graders with at least one parent who is a college graduate, an astonishing 37% still fall below basic in contrast to just 17% of Black females. A gender gap of similar proportions also occurs among Hispanic students of similar socioeconomic status..

The gender gaps in the foundational skill of reading are also an important policy concern. A third of male students at the 12th grade level fall below basic compared to 22% of female students. Less than a third of male students (29%) are reading at the proficient or advanced levels compared to 41% of female students. Over half of Black males (53%) are reading below basic compared to 40% of Black females. A gender gap of similar magnitude occurs among Hispanic students.

In mathematics and science, gender gaps have almost disappeared. In mathematics, 38% of males are achieving below basic compared to 40% of females. In science, 44% of males and 48% of females are achieving below basic. Small gender gaps in favor of males occur at the proficient and advanced levels. In mathematics, an astonishing 70% of both Black males and females are achieving below basic and miniscule numbers (about 5%)

are achieving at the proficient or advanced levels. Very small gender gaps in favor of males are similarly occurring for Hispanic students

In science again, small gender gaps occur in favor of males at the below basic level (males, 44%; females, 48%) and at the proficient and advanced levels (males, 22%; females, 16%) Black and Hispanic males are achieving abysmal scores in science (Black males, 79% below basic; Black females, 82% below basic), but the gender gap is too small to warrant policy attention specifically to females.

At the 12th grade level, the NAEP tests a variety of other subjects: economics, civics, geography, and U.S. history. Gender gaps are small, favoring females in civics, and favoring males in economics, geography, and U.S. history. Small gender gaps but favoring females in both civics and geography and males in economics and U.S. history occur for Black and Hispanics.

Sex Differences at the 8th and 4th grade levels: To avoid repetitious detail, I will discuss only sex differences at earlier levels which depart from the pattern at the 12th grade levels.

At the 8th grade, in writing, substantial gender gaps occur but of a smaller magnitude. Writing achievement, shows a policy significant gender gap similar to the 12th grade level; the gender gap in reading achievement is even wider at the 8th grade level; the gender gap in mathematics is trivial; and the gender gap in science is the same as at the 12th grade level; and the gender gap in other tested subjects (civics, geography, economics, U.S.

history) are the same with the exception of females also having a slight advantage in civics, rather than males).

At the 4th grade, the gender gap favors females in reading, but at this lower grade level, the gender gap is small (6% of males below basic as opposed to 11% of at the 12th grade). In writing, the 4th grade gender gap is small (10% of males below basic as opposed to 15% below basic at the 12th grade). No gender gap in mathematics occurs at the 4th grade level. A small gender gap similar in size to at the 12th grade level occurs in science. No gender gap appears in U.S. history; males achieve slightly better in civics (a reversal of the 12th grade gender gap); and males also achieve slightly better in geography.

In short, the policy-relevant problem is the serious gender gap in the basic skills of reading and writing, which appears at all grade levels, with the worst gender gaps occurring at the 12th grades. In mathematics, science, and other subjects, gender gaps are small or trivial but favor males. In terms of policy discussion and educational investments, the nation is addressing gender differences which barely exist but ignoring gender gaps which are substantial. Policy attention has focused on the supposed underachievement of females in mathematics and science but these gender gaps are trivial. In contrast, substantial gender gaps are occurring in reading and writing. The gender gap in literacy has not become a policy issue, but basic literacy where males are at a serious disadvantage is where the problem is found.

Scores on the Scholastic Achievement Test and American College Test

In policy discussions of the gender gap in school achievement, gender differences on the high stakes Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) are often used to rebut the position that a boy crisis exists. The problem with gender comparisons on these college entry tests, however, is that more women go to college and take these tests so women are more apt to be drawn from lower levels of the talent pool. In 2007, for example, more high school senior women (54%) took the SAT (College Board, 2007).

On the 2007 SAT (College Board, 2007), females scored higher in writing (females, 500; male, 489) while males scored considerably higher in mathematics (females, 502; males, 533). Further, when SAT scores are analyzed by achievement band, far more males scored at the very top and far more males scored at the bottom. At the very highest range of the SAT composite scores on reading and mathematics (1600 to 1530), males are substantially ahead (male, 61%; females, 40%). Even when the writing test is included, an area of pronounced female advantage, sex differences in favor of males at the very highest range (2400 to 2330) remain large (males, 55%; females, 45%). The proportion of females in the lowest range of the SAT (600 to 1520) is 55%.

On the ACT in 2007, (ACT High School Profile, 2007), however, despite the larger number of college-bound females who take the test (females, 55%; males, 45%), male and female composite scores are just about equal (males, 21.2; females 21.0). The far greater gender gaps on the SAT very likely occur because the ACT is more closely linked to the high school curriculum, where girls outpace boys in school grades, while the SAT

measures more general intellectual skills, dependent on experiences outside of school.

A helpful correction to the problems of larger numbers of female test-takers is to examine sex differences on ACT scores in Colorado and Illinois, where all graduating seniors are required to take the ACT and in Maine, where all graduating seniors are required to take the SAT. The gender gap on composite ACT scores in both Colorado and Illinois was almost nonexistent, but girls did slightly better in reading and English while boys did slightly better in science and mathematics (ACT High School Profile Report, 2007) In Maine in 2007, girls had a 32 point advantage in the writing section, a 13 point advantage in the verbal section, and a 12 point disadvantage in mathematics (Corbett et al., 2008). These gender differences on the SAT and ACT generally reinforce the findings of the NAEP with a gender gap favoring females in reading and writing and a gender gap favoring males in mathematics.

School Grades

The most useful source of information on sex differences in students' grade point average is the High School Transcript Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), which examines grades at the end of high school for a nationally representative sample of 26,000 high school graduates. This study is particularly reliable since it does not rely on self-reported grades. From 1990 through 2005, young women show a consistent advantage each year in grade point average and the gender gap in grades in favor of females has increased since 1990. In 2005, females' grade point average was a B

(3.09) while males' grade point average was a C+ (2.86). In 1990, females' GPA was C6 (2.77) while males' grade point average was a C (2.59). Even in mathematics and science, where males achieve higher test scores, the GPA of young women was higher than the grade point average of young men.

Other large, nationally representative studies, such as the 1972 Longitudinal Survey of high school seniors and the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of high school students show a considerable female advantage in high school grades. Analyzing these surveys, Golden, Katz, and Kuziemko (2006:8) conclude that "girls achieved considerably higher grades in high school than did boys" and "in the NLS, the median girl was 17 percentile points [in class rank] above the median boy." The Higher Education Research Institute has surveyed American college freshmen since 1966 and its standard survey question asks freshmen to report their high school grade point average (Pryor et al., 2007). The pattern of male disadvantage in grade point average is consistent across years. In 2007, for example, 28% of freshmen women reported a gpa of A or A6 in high school compared to 21% of freshmen men.

Even in school districts which serve white students of high socioeconomic status, where families presumably emphasize school success, show a large gender gap in favor of females in school grades. In the Wilmette School District in Illinois, for example, a report on gender differences (Wilmette, 2006) shows that 74% of 5th grade girls received an A in reading compared to just 51% of boys. Even in mathematics, subjects of typical male advantage, 70% of 5th grade girls received an A in mathematics

compared to just 54% of boys. In science, 67% of girls received an A compared to 60% of boys. In the Edina public school in Minneapolis, with a predominantly white, high income student body, two-thirds of students of female 6th through 12th graders on the A Honor roll were female and 35% were male (Edina Public Schools, 2002).

In sum, girls achieve higher grades in school than boys across all school subjects and enter college with a higher grade point average. Even the AAUW report challenging the idea that boys lag behind girls acknowledge the existence of a gender gap in grades (Corbett et al., 2008).

Engagement in School

Boys are less likely to do homework and more likely to come to school unprepared, which aggravates teachers and reduces school grades. Three times as many boys as girls said they did no homework whatsoever (males, 11%; females, 4%). Of students who said they did an hour or less of homework each week, 19% were boys and 14% were girls (United States High School sophomores, 1982-2002). Similarly, far more boys said they usually or often came to school unprepared. Over 30% of boys said they usually or often came to school without their homework compared to 21% of girls. Twenty-two percent of boys said they usually or often came to school without even paper, pen or pencils compared to just 13% of girls. Similar sex differences in school engagement also occur among academically oriented students, those who enter college (Pryor et al, 2007a). Males were more apt to spend no time or an hour or less in a typical week without

homework, were less likely to come late to class and less apt to ask questions in class and feedback on their academic work.

Females also show major differences in participation in school activities (Freeman, 2004). With the exception of athletic teams where males (45%) more than females (32%), females participated more in student council and student government (13% female, males, 8%). ,music and the performing arts (females. 31%, males, 19%), academic clubs (females, 19%; males, 12%). Females were also more engaged in many other school clubs and activities (females, 44%; males, 26%).

Course-taking

In gifted and talented programs at both the elementary and secondary levels, no gender gap occurs in participation. Black males, on the other hand, are under-represented in these programs (Schott Foundation, 2006). While Black males comprise 9% of the school population, less than 4% are Black males.

Boys are more apt to repeat a grade (Freeman, 2004). While 8% of males repeated a grade, just 5% of females did. The preponderance of males repeating a grade was especially high among Blacks and Hispanics. Among Black males, for example, more than one in ten repeated a grade in school.

Students enrolled in special education classes are far more likely to be males. In 2001-2002, of secondary students with disabilities, 69% were male and 32% were female. Among students with emotional disturbance, 76% were male. Of students with learning disabilities, 73% were male. Of students with multiple disabilities, 65% were male. Hyperactivity is far more common among males with studies measuring the gender gap ranging from 8 to 1 to 3 to 1. Boys are more than twice as likely to receive a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and be placed on medication (Simpson et al., 2008; Center for Disease Control, 2007). While these high rates of male disability may be based on a trustworthy diagnosis, they may reflect lack of teacher tolerance for active males.

A well-accepted measure of the difficulty of the high school curriculum is the “New Basics” curriculum consisting of four years of English, three years of social science, three years of mathematics and science, two years of a foreign language, and one semester of computer science. In 2000, 33% of female high school graduates completed these courses compared to 29% of males (King, 2006). Similarly, 54% of female sophomores compared to 48% of males were enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Males were more apt to have taken both remedial English and remedial mathematics courses.

The Advanced Placement Program offers coursework for especially able talented high school students and students who achieve a 3 (qualified) or higher typically receive college credit. The AP tests measure not only

advanced high school achievement but also motivation, since these difficult courses require far more homework than other high school courses.

Among college freshmen, more females had taken advanced placement tests (Pryor et al., 2007b). Among female students, 43% had taken 1-4 AP tests, and 43% had taken 5 to 9 tests. Among male students, 39% had taken 1 to 4 tests, and 41% had taken 5 to 9 tests. Test-taking followed primarily traditional patterns with more females taking AP tests in English literature and composition (64%), psychology (64%), and world history (56%). Males, however, were far more likely to take AP tests in computer science (84%) and such science courses as physics (65%). While females also took more tests in human geography, world history, and European history, more males took AP exams in microeconomics, macroeconomics, government and politics.

Dropout

The calculation of high school dropout rates is controversial, with different researchers using different statistical techniques, examining different numbers of states, and thus different populations of students (Haplin and Klasnik, 2006; Greene and Winters, 2006; Orfield, 2004). Whatever the method of analysis, the fundamental story is the same: Far more males compared to females drop out of high school with a dramatic gender gap among males and females.

Among all students, 32% of males dropped out of school compared to 25% of female students. While 52% of Black males dropped out of school,

39% of Black females did. While 48% of Hispanic males dropped out of schools, just 37% of females did. Furthermore, minority boys are more likely to be “idle,” neither in school nor working (Edelman et al., 2006).

Examining in 1999 the numbers of idle young men, 17% of Black young men ages 16 to 24 were idle, as were 12% of Hispanic males, and just 4% of white males.

Boys are far more apt to be suspended and expelled, especially Black males. Of kindergarten through 12th grade students, 9% of males had been suspended during their school years compared to 4% of female students, and three times as many males had been expelled (Freeman and Fox, 2005). Black males were suspended at nearly three times the rate of white male students (2008). Boys are far more likely to be expelled even from preschool programs—boys were expelled at a rate of 4.5 times more than girls.

Students Receiving Top Academic Honors

The National Honor Society requires a grade point average of B or above and participants are chosen on the basis as well of outstanding achievement in service, leadership, character, and citizenship. According to an enrollment specialist, almost twice the proportion of females (64%) compared to males (36%) were members of the National Honor Society in 2007, and this proportion has remained constant in recent years (Felder, personal communication, March 28, 2008).

Given the increased policy emphasis on closing the gender gap in science and mathematics, winners of the prestigious Intel Science Talent

Search and the Siemens Math, Science, and Technology competition are a visible indicator of the sex of students at the pinnacle of achievement. From 2006 through 2008, all the first place winners of the Intel competition have been female. From 2001 through 2008, 5 females and 3 males took top place. Among the top ten winners, however, females placed in 50% of award winners in just three of these eight years with males predominating in five of these eight years.

The Siemens Math, Science, and Technology winners are most often males. In 2007-2008, however, young women swept the Siemens competition for the first time with one female achieving first place in the individual competition and two females achieving first place in the team competition. In the previous year, however, a male achieved first place in the individual competition, and three males placed first in the team competition. In 2005-2006, again the first place individual winner was male and the team winners consisted of a male and a female.

Rhodes Scholars are selected from college seniors on the basis of their achievement and contributions to their fields and to socially important endeavors. Examining the sex distribution of Rhodes Scholars from 2004 through 2008, males predominate, receiving 55% of prestigious Rhodes scholarships in these four years.

Postsecondary Education Enrollment and Graduation Rates

The alarm about a “boy crisis” is most often justified by the increasing proportion of males who enter and graduate from college. Students who

enroll in postsecondary education right after high school have higher rates of graduation than students who postpone college (Horn et al., 2005), and these are more apt to be female (King, 2006). Women are also more apt to complete a bachelor degree within five years of entering college (Freeman, 2004). Among freshmen seeking a bachelor's degree who graduated from high school in 1966, 66% of young women but only 59% of males had completed a bachelor's degree by 2001. This gender gap was far higher among Blacks (males, 37%; females, 51%).

A large gender gap has developed in postsecondary education, with the percentage of women who are female increasing from 52% to 56% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). A large gender gap has also developed in the attainment of most secondary degrees, with the problem especially serious among Black and Hispanic males (Buchmann and Diprete, 2006). Among whites, women obtained 61% of associate degrees, 57% of bachelor's degrees, 62% of master's degrees, 54% of doctoral degrees, and 53% of first-professional degrees. Among Blacks, women obtained 61% of associate degrees, 66% of bachelor's degrees, 72% of master's degrees, 64% of doctoral degrees, and 64% of first-professional degrees. Among Hispanics, women obtained 62% of associate degrees, 61% of bachelor's degrees, 65% of master's degrees, 56% of doctoral degrees, and 48% of first-professional degrees.

The enrollment and graduation rates of women in the prestigious, high income fields of law and medicine has just about reached parity with that of men. In medical school, 49% of both first-year students and graduates were women in 2005-2006 (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2008). In

law schools, 47% of both first-year students and graduates were women in 2007-2008 (American Bar Association, 2008).

The gender gap in obtaining postsecondary degrees has several, overlapping explanations. Given the rise in divorce rates since the 1960s, women see a far greater need to be able to support themselves and their children (Golden et al., 2006). The Women's Movement has created an image of the contemporary woman as independent and self-sufficient while men find their traditional role as major family provider of less importance, and they are more able to find sexual satisfaction without the need to marry and support a family. Gains in income for postsecondary educational attainment, the 'wage premium,' are greater for women than for men (Perna, 2004). Women are also more likely to want employment in credentialed occupations, such as teaching, nursing, and counseling, where a postsecondary degree is necessary. Young men are also less apt to enjoy the experience of schooling (Gurian and Stevens, 2005; Tyre, 2008).

Mental Health and Suicide

Boys suffer from far more emotional and behavioral problems than girls. Among students ages 4 to 17, almost 1 in 5 parents had talked to a health care provider or school staff about their sons' problems, compared to just over 1 in 10 who had talked about their daughter's problems (Simpson et al., 2008). Further, boys were also prescribed medication for these problems twice as often as girls.

Suicide: The most compelling evidence of a “boy crisis” is the overwhelming gender gap in suicides. To take one’s own life signifies profound pessimism and psychological disturbance. The suicide of their children creates lasting emotional damage to families who blame themselves for not recognizing psychological problems and doing enough to prevent their children from killing themselves.

The most recent information on suicide by sex and age group is available from the National Center for Health Statistics. Suicide rates were calculated from this data system for this study from 1995 to 2005. Males outnumber females in completed suicides by astonishing rates, especially young men from ages 20 to 24, when young men are beginning adult life.

- Among 20 to 24 year-olds, 20.7 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to 3.5 per 100,000 among females.
- Among 15 to 19 year-olds, 12.5 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to 2.8 among females.
- Among 10 to 14 year-olds, 1.9 suicides per 100,000 occurred among males compared to .7 among females.

Suicide Attempts: While completed suicides are far more common among males, ranging from 6 to 2 times as often in different age groups, suicide attempts, gestures, and ideation are more common among females (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2008). In 2007, female students were more likely to seriously consider

attempting suicide (females, 19%; males, 10%); make a plan about how they would commit suicide (females, 13%; males, 9%); and actually attempt suicide (females, 9%; males, 5%). Suicide ideation and plans are a common sign of depression, a serious psychological disorder where females predominate. The completed suicides of young men, also indicate high rates of depression and other serious mental health problems.

Depression: A psychiatric diagnosis of depression differs substantially from the common usage of the term—feeling miserable. The psychiatric diagnosis is “major depressive disorder” and includes such symptoms as loss of interest in pleasurable activities, crying, self-hatred, inability to make decisions, isolating one’s self, extremely low energy, and suicidal thoughts. Depression among children and adolescents is often a precursor or severe and debilitating depression in adulthood.

A recent review of the literature on depression concludes that girls experience depressive symptoms far more frequently than boys (Bailey, 2007). Twice as many teenage girls suffer from depression (Cicchetti and Toth, 1998). The greater proportion of female high school students experiencing depression is also documented for high school students who enter college. Eight percent of female college freshmen in 2007 said they felt depressed in high school compared to five percent of males (Pryor et al., 2007b).

Eating disorders are also far more common among girls, particularly perfectionist girls from middle-class families who are responding to cultural pressures to be thin. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention

and Health Promotion (2008) found that eating disorders, including vomiting and taking laxatives to control weight were far more common among girls (females, 6%; males, 2%).

Conduct Disorders: The diagnosis of conduct disorder is based on antisocial behavior spanning physical aggression, extensive lying, stealing, destruction of property, and conflicts with authority. (Nationally representative studies of conduct disorders among American children could not be located, but sophisticated studies of conduct disorders among British and Australian children have been conducted.)

Boys predominate in conduct disorders by wide margins. In a study of 10,438 children, ages 5 to 15, drawn from the 1999 British Child Mental Health Survey, conduct disorders were found to be almost three times as frequent in boys compared to girls (Maughan et al., 2004). The most comprehensive and sophisticated study of sex differences in antisocial behavior followed a sample of 1,000 children from age 3 to 21 (Moffitt et al, 2001). Almost all girls who engaged in antisocial behavior fit the “adolescence limited” type, where the sex ratio was 1.5 males to 1 female. Far more males fit the more serious “life-course-persistent type of antisocial behavior where the sex ratio was 10 males to 1 female. Thus, the female form of conduct disorder was primarily a phenomenon of adolescence, while the male type led to serious antisocial behavior such as adult criminality.

Premature deaths and injuries: Among children and young people from ages 5 to 24 in 1995 to 2005, males are far more likely to die from violence and virtually every other type of risky behavior—firearms,

drowning, motor vehicles, motorcycles and bicycle deaths (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995-2005). To take a few examples, among 20 to 24 year-olds, 48.2 per 10,000 males compared to just 8.1 per 100,000 females die from violence. Among 15 to 19 year-olds, 28.6 per 100,000 males die from violence compared to 5.7 per 100,000 females. Among 20 to 24 year-old males, 36.4 per 100,000 die from firearms compared to 4 per 100,000 females.

Males of every age group also have higher rates of injury in every category except self-harm (National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, 2006). The rate of nonfatal firearm injuries among 20 to 24 year-olds, for example, was 154.7 per 100,000 injuries among young men compared to 16.8 among young women. Among 15 to 19 year-olds, the rate of such injuries was 126.2 per 100,000 among boys compared to just 11.3 per 100,000 among girls.

Delinquency and Arrests

In juvenile delinquency and in arrest rates for every type of offense with the exception of runaways, males predominate by wide margins (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2007). Among males, the delinquency rate is 74.7 cases per 1,000 compared to 29.4 cases per 1,000 among females.

Turning to specific offenses, arrests for violent crimes (including murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault are 486.2 cases per 100,000 among males compared to 108.7 cases per 100,000

among females. Arrests for property crimes (including burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) are 1605.5 cases per 100,000 males compared to 805.8 per 100,00 among females. Arrests for drug abuse violations are 968.5 cases per 100,000 among males compared to 191.3 cases among females. It is important to keep in mind that arrest rates are not the same as conviction rates, which are unavailable.

Conclusion

American boys are suffering serious problems. In education, these center in the areas of far lower literacy, lower school grades, lower engagement in school, higher dropout from school, higher rates of repeating a grade, higher placement in special education, higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, and lower rates of postsecondary enrollment and graduation. In each of these domains, Black boys and young men are doing far worse than Black girls and young women.

Young men are far less prepared than young women to succeed in the current knowledge-based economy, are more likely to suffer from substantial declines in real income, and are far more vulnerable to unemployment in times of economic recession. Less educated young men participate less in civic and political

activities, are less likely to marry, and are less attractive mates to increasingly high-achieving, well-educated young women.

At the top, however, boys and young men are succeeding at higher rates than girls. Boys are more likely to take demanding Advanced Placement examinations in the sciences and have consistently outperformed girls at the pinnacle of achievement, such as winners of the Intel Science Competition, the Siemens Math, Science, and Technology Competition, and Rhodes scholars.

While some analysts argue that the fundamental issues are race and class, rather than sex, this is not the case. It is boys who are performing at strikingly lower levels in literacy. It is boys who have substantially higher dropout rates, placement in special education classes, disciplinary problems leading to suspension and expulsion, and far lower levels of school engagement and participation in postsecondary education. Black boys are particularly at risk.

While the educational problems of girls have led to numerous policy efforts to increase their achievement in areas where they are behind, such as achievement in mathematics and science at the top, the problems of boys have been largely ignored by federal

agencies, foundations, and school districts. This study has brought together available information on boys' difficulties, which demonstrate the need to focus on these issues. Great Britain and Australia have led the way, initiating numerous educational programs, especially in literacy, to identify best practices and deal with boys' educational deficits. Several approaches have been proposed—single sex schools and classroom, changes in the curricula of Schools of Education, inservice programs for teachers on the problems of boys, male mentors offering models of successful manhood, and more male teachers. Few of these ideas have been put into practice and scientific evaluations of their relative success is non-existent. The policy emphasis on girls' issues has continued, shifting from school achievement to increasing the numbers of young women entering and succeeding in demanding scientific careers.

But the “boy crisis” concerns far more than educational difficulties. Boys and young men suffer from far higher suicide rates, conduct disorders, juvenile delinquency, and arrest rates, especially for serious crimes. This is not to say that girls and young women are not at risk for mental health problems. Rates of depression and eating disorders are far higher among females. These problems should not be ignored.

Advocacy groups who proclaim either a “boy crisis” or a “girl crisis” are misguided. Neither sex is in crisis with the exception of Black boys and young men. The characteristic difficulties of girls, however, have been and are still being addressed. The difficulties of boys, however, which span far more areas, have been generally ignored. Those who call attention to the problems of boys are not anti-feminist or resentful of girls’ progress and success. The debate over which sex is worse off goes in no useful direction. Both boys and girls face characteristic problems which need policy attention.

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